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THE
HOLY GRAIL

BY

ALFRED TENNYSON.

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FROM

THE IDYLS OF THE KING



✓ BY

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BIOGRAPHICAL AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

"ALFRED TENNYSON was born August 5, 1809, at Somersby a hamlet in Lincolnshire, England, of which, and of a neighboring parish, his father, Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was rector. The poet's mother was Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. Stephen Fytche, vicar of Louth. Alfred was the third of seven sons—Frederick, Charles, Alfred, Edward, Horatio, Arthur, and Septimus. A daughter, Cecilia, became the wife of Edmund Law Lushington, long professor of Greek in Glasgow University. Whether there were other daughters, the biographies of the poet do not mention.

Tennyson's career as a poet dates back as far as 1827, in which year, he being then but eighteen years of age, he published anonymously, in connection with his brother Charles (who was only thirteen months his senior, having been born July 4, 1808), a small volume, entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*. The Preface, which is dated March, 1827, states that the poems contained in the volume 'were written from the ages of fifteen to eighteen, not conjointly, but individually; which may account for the difference of style and matter.'

In 1828, or early in 1829, these two brothers entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where their eldest brother, Frederick, had already entered. At the Cambridge Commencement in 1829, Alfred took the Chancellor's gold medal, by his poem entitled *Timbuctoo*. That appears to have been the first year of his acquaintance, which soon ripened into an ardent friendship, with Arthur Henry Hallam; this friendship, as we learn from the twenty-second section of *In Memoriam*, having been, at the death of Hallam, of 'four sweet years,' duration. It is an interesting fact that Hallam was one of Tennyson's rival competitors for the Chancellor's prize. His poem is dated June, 1829. It is contained in his *Literary Remains*. Among other of Tennyson's friends at the University were John Mitchell

Kemble, the Anglo-Saxon scholar; William Henry Brookfield, long an eloquent preacher in London; James Spedding, the biographer and editor of Lord Bacon; Henry Alford, Dean of Canterbury; Richard Monckton Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton), who united the poet and the politician, and was the biographer of Keats; and Richard Chenevix Trench, who became Dean of Westminster, in 1856, and Archbishop of Dublin, in 1864. A brilliant array of college friends!

Tennyson's prize poem was published shortly after the Cambridge Commencement of 1829, and was very favorably noticed in *The Athenæum* of July 22, 1829. In it can already be recognized much of the real Tennyson. There are, indeed, but very few poets whose earliest productions exhibit so much of their after selves. The real Byron, the most vigorous in his diction of all modern poets, hardly appears at all in his *Hours of Idleness*, which was published when he was about the age of Tennyson was when *Timbuctoo* was published.

In 1830 appeared *Poems, chiefly Lyrical, by Alfred Tennyson*. In this volume appeared, among others, the poems entitled *Ode to Memory*, *The Poet*, *The Poet's Mind*, *The Deserted House*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*, which were full of promise, and struck key-notes of future works. The reviews of the volume mingled praise and blame—the blame perhaps being predominant. In 1832 appeared *Poems by Alfred Tennyson*, among which were included *The Lady of Shalott*, *The Miller's Daughter*, *The Palace of Art*, *The Lotos Eaters*, and *A Dream of Fair Women*, all showing a great advance in workmanship and a more distinctly articulate utterance—many of the poems of the previous volumes being rather artist-studies in vowel and melody suggestiveness. It was reviewed, somewhat facetiously, in *The Quarterly*, July, 1833, (vol. 49, pp. 81-96,) by, as was generally understood, John Gibson Lockhart, the son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott, at that time editor of *The Quarterly*; and in a more earnest and generous vein, by John Stuart Mill, in *The Westminster*, July, 1835.

A silence of ten years succeeded the 1832 volume, broken only by an occasional contribution of a short poem to some magazine or collection. In 1842 appeared *Poems by Alfred Tennyson*, in two volumes, containing selections from the volumes of 1830 and 1832, and many new poems, among which were *Ulysses*, *Love and Duty*, *The Talking Oak*, *Godiva*, and the remarkable poems of *The Two Voices*, and *The Vision of*

Sin. The volumes were most enthusiastically received, and Tennyson took at once his place as England's great poet. A second edition followed in 1843, a third in 1845, a fourth in 1846, and a fifth in 1848. Then came *The Princess: A Medley*, 1847; a second edition, 1848; *In Memoriam*, 1850, three editions appearing in the same year.

The poet was married June 13, 1850, to Emily, daughter of Henry Sellwood, Esq., and niece of Sir John Franklin, of Arctic Expedition fame. Wordsworth had died April 23 of that year, and the laureateship was vacant. After some opposition, the chief coming from *The Athenæum*, which advocated the claims of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson received the appointment, his *In Memoriam*, which had appeared a short time before, and which at once laid hold of so many hearts, contributing much, no doubt, to the final decision. His presentation to the queen took place at Buckingham Palace, March 6, 1851, and in the same month appeared the seventh edition of the *Poems*, with an introductory poem *To the Queen*, in which he pays a high tribute to his predecessor in the laureateship:—

‘Victoria, since your royal grace
To one of less desert allows
This laurel greener from the brows
Of him that uttered nothing base;’

To do much more than note the titles of his principal works since he became Poet-Laureate, the prescribed limit of this sketch will not allow. In 1855 appeared *Maud*, which, though it met with great disapprobation and but stinted praise, is, perhaps, one of his greatest poems. In July, 1859, the first of the *Idyls of the King* appeared, namely, *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*, which were at once great favorites with all readers of the poet; in August, 1864, *Enoch Arden*, with which were published *Aylmer's Field*, *Sea Dreams*, *The Grandmother*, and *The Northern Farmer*; in December, 1869, four additional *Idyls*, under the title, *The Holy Grail and Other Poems*, namely—*The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettare*, and *The Passing of Arthur*, of which forty thousand copies were ordered in advance; in December, 1871, in *The Contemporary Review*, *The Last Tournament*; in 1872, *Gareth and Lynette*; in 1875, *Queen Mary: A Drama*; in 1877, *Harold: Drama*; in 1880, *Ballads and Other Poems*.

Tennyson's Muse has been productive of a body of lyric, idyllic, metaphysical, and narrative or descriptive poetry, the

choicest, rarest, daintiest, and of the most exquisite workmanship of any that the century has to show. In a strictly dramatic direction he can hardly be said to have been successful. His *Queen Mary* is but little short of a failure as a drama, and his *Harold* but a partial success. With action proper he has shown but little sympathy, and in the domain of vicarious thinking and feeling, in which Robert Browning is so pre-eminent, but little ability. But no one who is well acquainted with all the best poetry of the nineteenth century, will hesitate to pronounce him *facile princeps* in the domain of the lyric and idyllic; and in these departments of poetry he has developed a style at once individual and, in an artistic point of view, almost 'faultily faultless'—a style which may be traced from his earliest efforts up to the most complete perfection of his latest poetical works.

The splendid poetry he has given to the world has been the product of the most patient elaboration. No English poet, with the exception of Milton, Wordsworth, and the Brownings, ever worked with a deeper sense of the divine mission of poetry than Tennyson has worked. And he has worked faithfully, earnestly, and conscientiously to realize the ideal with which he appears to have been early possessed. To this ideal he gave expression in two of his early poems, entitled *The Poet* and *The Poet's Mind*; and in another of his early poems, *The Lady of Shalott*, is mystically shadowed forth the relations which poetic genius should sustain to the world for whose spiritual redemption it labors, and the fatal consequences of its being seduced by the world's temptations—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Great thinkers and writers owe their power among men, not necessarily so much to a wide range of ideas, or to the originality of their ideas, as to the intense vitality which they are able to impart to some one comprehensive, fructifying idea, with which, through constitution and the circumstances of their times, they have become possessed. It is only when a man is really possessed with an idea (that is, if it does not run away with him) that he can express it with a quickening power, and ring all possible changes upon it.

What may be said to be the dominant idea, and the most vitalized, in the poetry of Alfred Tennyson? It is easily noted. It glints forth everywhere in his poetry. It is, that the complete man must be a well-poised duality of the active and

the passive or receptive; must unite with an 'all-subtilizing intellect,' an 'all-comprehensive tenderness;' must 'gain in sweetness and in moral height, nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world.'"

Thus far Dr. Corson, of Cornell University, in his Introduction to *The Two Voices*, and *A Dream of Fair Women*, poems edited by him for the *English Classics*.

"It seems to me that the only just estimate of Tennyson's position is that which declares him to be by eminence, the representative poet of the recent era. Not, like one or another of his compeers, representative of the melody, wisdom, passion, or other partial phase of the era, but of the time itself, with its diverse elements in harmonious conjunction. * * * * *

In his verse he is as truly 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form' of the Victorian generation in the nineteenth century as Spenser was of the Elizabethan court, Milton of the Protectorate, Pope of the reign of Queen Anne. During his supremacy there have been few great leaders at the head of different schools, such as belonged to the time of Byron, Wordsworth, and Keats. His poetry has gathered all the elements which find vital expression in the complex modern art."—Stedman's *Victorian Poets*.

"To describe his command of language by any ordinary terms expressive of fluency or force would be to convey an idea both inadequate and erroneous. It is not only that he knows every word in the language suited to express his every idea; he can select with the ease of magic the word that above all others is best for his purpose; nor is it that he can at once summon to his aid the best word the language affords; with an art which Shakespeare never scrupled to apply, though in our day it is apt to be counted mere Germanism, and pronounced contrary to the genius of the language, he combines old words into new epithets, he daringly mingles all colors to bring out tints that never were on sea or shore. His words gleam like pearls and opals, like rubies and emeralds. He yokes the stern vocables of the English tongue to the chariot of his imagination, and they become gracefully brilliant as the leopards of Bacchus, soft and glowing as the Cytherean doves. He must have been born with an ear for verbal sounds, an instinctive appreciation of the beautiful and delicate in words, hardly ever equaled. Though his later works speak less of the blossom-time—show less of the efflorescence and iridescence, and mere glance and gleam of colored words—they display no falling off, but rather an advance, in the mightier elements of rhythmic speech."—*Peter Bayne*.

SYNOPSIS IDYLS OF THE KING.

THE *Idyls of the King* is a group of magnificent poems—ten in number—dealing with the character and reign of King Arthur, and describing the exploits of the Knights of the Round Table, when these knights were at the height of their glory, and when they had fallen to the depths of their shame. These poems picture, also, the life of Queen Guinevere at the Court and in the Abbey, her death, and that of her lord. They were dedicated by their author to the memory of Prince Albert, and afterwards to Queen Victoria. Having to do exclusively with the Arthurian legends, which have come down to us in numberless books of prose and of poetry, these poems belong, in their subject-matter, to the past. But the legends have filtered through the poet's nature, been etherealized by his imagination, and moulded by his artistic hands into such felicitous forms that this great work is, and will forever remain, fascinating to all lovers of the beautiful in thought and expression. Tennyson himself says of it that it is

New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak.

ms +
creating
a world
The great hero of the *Idyls*, though not always the most active, never contending in the tournaments, is

King Arthur. Of him, as a veritable and historical personage, nothing can be said. But he is the idealized and idolized hero of British and Welsh legend; is even the *Magnificence* of Spenser's *Fairie Queene* (see Spenser's dedication of the poem to Sir Walter Raleigh, and also the opening stanzas of Canto IX., Book I). He is as real, or, if you please, as mythical, a character as William Tell. He is the reputed son of a reputed king, Uther—Pendragon (dragon-head), a surname, Ritson says, taken possibly from the form of his helmet or his crest. From him Arthur inherits the title. Arthur grew up ignorant

of his high birth, was taken to London, and, there drawing from a stone, in which it was imbedded, a sword on which was inscribed, "Whoso pulleth this sword out of this stone is rightwise born King of England," was crowned King of Britain. His fabulous exploits in arms, as recorded by the Welshman Geoffrey of Monmouth, about 1138, and in a multitude of poems afterwards, put to shame the achievements of Alexander or of Cæsar. His great enemy, near at home, was the Saxons, after their invasion of the Island in 449. With them he is said to have fought twelve battles (of which Lancelot speaks in *Elaine*), in all of which he was conqueror. The battle-fields have been placed in half the shires of England, and in Wales, and their location is as certain, probably, as the battles themselves, or even as the existence of their victor! Where were

Arthur's Palaces is equally uncertain. Carleon-upon-Usk, the Isca Silurum of the Romans, is said to have been his chief city. But places claiming the honor of his residence are found scattered throughout the Island.

For an epitome of the facts concerning a real, historic Arthur, the basis, perhaps, of the mythical Arthur of the Romances, see "Arthur," *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

The **Round Table** was the famous circle of knights gathered around Arthur as their head. Who these knights were and what they were to do may as well be told in Tennyson's own lines, put into the mouth of Arthur, in *Guinevere*:

But I was first of all the kings who drew
 The knighthood-errant of this realm, and all
 The realms, together under me, their Head,
 In that fair order of my Table Round,
 A glorious company, the flower of men,
 To serve as model for the mighty world,
 And be the fair beginning of a time.
 I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
 To reverence the King, as if he were
 Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
 To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
 To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
 To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
 To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
 To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
 And worship her by years of noble deeds
 Until they won her; for, indeed, I knew

Of no more subtle master under heaven
 Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
 Not only to keep down the base in man
 But teach high thought and amiable words
 And courtliness and the desire of fame
 And love of truth and all that makes a man.

How this circle had declined in virtue the *Idyls* show. But one is grateful to Tennyson that, in the exquisite poems embraced under this title, these knights are lifted out of the grossness of their sins, in which Sir Thomas Mallory makes them wallow, in his *History of King Arthur*. Of this group

Lancelot was chief, at least in prowess, and the favorite of Arthur. He is especially prominent in *Elaine*; sinning in his love for Queen Guinevere, and yet repenting, and dying, at last, "a holy man." He is represented as born in Brittany. On the death of his father, he was carried away, then an infant, by Vivien, the lady of the lake, who fostered him; hence he was called *Lancelot du Lac*. His birth and possessions in Britany explain his offer to Elaine of a "realm beyond the seas."

In his *Victorian Poets*, Stedman says: * * * "We come at last to Tennyson's master-work, so recently brought to a completion after twenty years—during which period the separate *Idyls of the King* had appeared from time to time. Nave and transept, aisle after aisle, the Gothic minster has extended, until, with the addition of a cloister here and a chapel yonder, the structure stands complete.

I hardly think that the poet at first expected to compose an epic. It has grown insensibly under the hands of one man who has given it the best years of his life,—but somewhat as Wolf conceived the Homeric poems to have grown, chant by chant, until the time came for the whole to be welded together in heroic form.

It is the epic of chivalry, the Christian ideal of chivalry which we have deduced from a barbaric source,—our conception of what knighthood should be, rather than what it really was; but so skillfully wrought of high imaginings, fairy spells, fantastic legends, and mediæval splendors, that the whole work, suffused with the Tennysonian glamour of golden mist, seems like a chronicle illuminated by saintly hands, and often blazes with light like that which flashed from the holy wizard-book when the covers were unclasped."

THE HOLY GRAIL.

TENNYSON's Holy Grail is based on a conception that has found expression under similar titles since A.D. 1100, when it first appeared in verse.

The Holy Grail, according to some legends of the middle ages, was the cup used by our Saviour in dispensing the wine at the last supper; and according to others, the platter on which the paschal lamb was served at the last Passover observed by our Lord. By some it was said to have been preserved by Joseph of Arimathea, who received into it the blood which flowed from the Redeemer's wounds as He hung on the cross. By others it was said to have been brought down from heaven by the angels, and committed to the charge of knights, who guarded it on the top of a lofty mountain. It is believed by some that where the body or the blood of Christ is, there are His soul and His divinity. That the Grail—such being its contents—should be marvelous, divine, mysterious, was but logical and natural. This cup, according to the legend, if approached by any but a perfectly pure and holy person, would be borne away and vanish from sight. The quest of the Grail was “the commencement of all bold enterprise, the occasion of all prowess and heroic deeds, the investigation of all the sciences, the demonstration of great wonders, the end of all bounty and goodness, the marvel of all marvels.”

M. Paulin Paris, who has been engaged for nearly forty years in the study of Arthurian romance, is of the opinion, that the legend conception came from some Welsh monk or hermit who lived early in the eighth century; that its guiding and essential purpose was an assertion for the British Church of an independent derivation of its Christianity direct from Palestine, and not through Rome; that the conception was embodied in a book called *Liber Gradalis*, or *De Gradali*; that this book was kept for more than three hundred years from a fear lest it should bring them into collision with the hierarchy and make their orthodoxy suspected; that it came to be known and read in the second half of the twelfth century; that a French poet, Robert de Boron, who probably had not seen the book, but received information regarding it, was the first to embody the conception in a vernacular literary form by writing his poem of *Joseph d'Arimathee*, and

that, after Boron, Walter Map and others came into the field. It is maintained by English writers generally that the conception arose certainly on British ground, but in the twelfth century, not in the eighth; that it was introduced by some master-hand, probably that of Walter Map, into every branch of Arthurian romance; and that if Map was not one author of the conception, as seems highly probable, he first invested it in literary form.

Accepting the general testimony of the MSS and assume without further proof that Map composed the original book of the *Saint Graal*, the genesis of the work seems not difficult to trace.

In early life, Map was a canon of Salisbury; either afterwards or at the same time he was parish priest of Westbury near Bristol. Gloucestershire and Wiltshire are both neighboring counties to Somersetshire, in which Glastonbury was the most sacred and celebrated spot. Visiting that ancient abbey, Map would have become acquainted with the legend of Joseph of Arimathea in all its details; and he would have seen the altar said to have been transported by angels from Palestine and which, long hidden from mortal sight on account of the wickedness of the times, had lately been revealed and reinstated. His versatile and capacious mind would as a matter of course have been familiar with the whole Arthur legend as it then (1170-1180) existed, if for no other reason because he lived in the very part of England which was studded with Arthurian sites. He fully answers to the description of the "great clerks" who, according to Robert de Boron, first made and told the history of the Grail.

The spread and ascendancy to which the Grail conception rapidly attained in all Christian countries made the creations of Arthurian romance the delight of all cultivated minds. From England, which we regard as the land of its origin, the Grail legend at once passed to France, where is given in metrical dress the legend of Percival, one of the knights of the Round Table, under the transformation which the Grail conception had effected. Flemish, Icelandic, and Welsh reproductions of the Grail romances have been found to exist. One of the first employments of the printing press in England, France, and Germany was to multiply poems or romances embodying this legend. Hence Caxton printed for Sir Thomas Malory (1485) *The History of King Arthur and his Noble Knights*, a work that has formed the basis of Tennyson's *Idyls of the King*, one of which is *The Holy Grail*.

THE HOLY GRAIL.

FROM noiseful arms, and acts of prowess done
In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,
Whom Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure,
Had passed into the silent life of prayer,
Praise, fast, and alms ; and leaving for the cowl
The helmet in an abbey far away
From Camelot, there, and not long after, died.

And one, a fellow-monk among the rest,
Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,
And honored him, and wrought into his heart
A way by love that wakened love within,
To answer that which came : and as they sat
Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn
That puffed the swaying branches into smoke
Above them, ere the summer when he died,
The monk Ambrosius questioned Percivale :

10

“ O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,
Spring after spring, for half a hundred years :

2. **Sir Percivale.**—The third son of Pellinore, king of Wales. He caught sight of the holy grail after his combat with Lancelot's brother, Ector de Maris, and both were healed by it. Sir Percivale was with Sir Bors and Sir Galahad when the visible Saviour went into the consecrated wafer given them by the bishop. This is called the achievement of the quest of the holy grail.

7. **Camelot.**—Arthur's palace, the ruins of which are still shown in Winchester.

20 For never have I known the world without,
 Nor ever strayed beyond the pale : but thee,
 When first thou camest—such a courtesy
 Spake through the limbs and in the voice—I knew
 For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall ;
 For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
 Some true, some light, but every one of you
 Stamped with the image of the King ; and now
 Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,
 My brother? was it earthly passion crost ?”

30 “Nay,” said the knight ; “for no such passion mine,
 But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail
 Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,
 And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out
 Among us in the jousts, while women watch
 Who wins, who falls ; and waste the spiritual strength
 Within us, better offered up to Heaven.”

To whom the monk : “The Holy Grail!—I trust
 We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much
 We molder—as to things without I mean—
 40 Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,
 Told us of this in our refectory,
 But spake with such a sadness and so low
 We heard not half of what he said. What is it?
 The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?”

“Nay, monk ! what phantom ?” answered Percivale.
 “The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
 Drank at the last sad supper with his own.
 This, from the blessed land of Aromat—
 After the day of darkness, when the dead

37. **To whom the monk said or responded.**

41. **Refectory.**—The eating-room of a monastery.

47. **With his own.**—*Disciples* understood.

48. **Aromat.**—Poetic name of Palestine, because of the abundance of spices from that region.

49. **Day of darkness.**—Referring to the crucifixion and the dead coming from their graves. (Matt. xxvii. 52.)

Went wandering o'er Moriah—the good saint, 50
 Arimathean Joseph, journeying brought
 To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
 Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.
 And there awhile it bode ; and if a man
 Could touch or see it, he was healed at once,
 By faith, of all his ills. But then the times
 Grew to such evil that the holy cup
 Was caught away to Heaven, and disappeared.”

To whom the monk : “ From our old books I know
 That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury, 60
 And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,
 Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build ;
 And there he built with wattles from the marsh
 A little lonely church in days of yore,
 For so they say, these books of ours, but seem
 Mute of this miracle, far as I have read.
 But who first saw the holy thing to-day ?”

“ A woman,” answered Percivale, “ a nun,
 And one no further off in blood from me
 Than sister ; and if ever holy maid 70
 With knees of adoration wore the stone,
 A holy maid ; though never maiden glowed,
 But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
 With such a fervent flame of human love,
 Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot
 Only to holy things ; to prayer and praise
 She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet,
 Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,
 Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,

50. **Moriah.**—The hill on which the temple of Jerusalem was built.

51. **Arimathean Joseph.**—In whose tomb the body of Jesus was laid. (Matt. xxvii. 57.)

52. **Glastonbury.**—The legend is that Joseph of Arimathea stuck his staff into the ground in the “sacred isle of Glastonbury,” and that this thorn blossoms on Christmas Day every year. St. Joseph and King Arthur were both buried at Glastonbury.

60. **That Joseph came.**—See introductory note.

70. **Arthur and the Table Round.**—See introductory note.

80 And the strange sound of an adulterous race,
Across the iron grating of her cell
Beat, and she prayed and fasted all the more.

“And he to whom she told her sins, or what
Her all but utter whiteness held for sin,
A man wellnigh a hundred winters old,
Spake often with her of the Holy Grail,
A legend handed down through five or six,
And each of these a hundred winters old,
From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur made
90 His Table Round, and all men's hearts became
Clean for a season, surely he had thought
That now the Holy Grail would come again ;
But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come,
And heal the world of all their wickedness !
'O Father !' asked the maiden, 'might it come
To me by prayer and fasting ?' 'Nay,' said he,
'I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow.'
And so she prayed and fasted, till the sun
Shone, and the wind blew, through her, and I thought
100 She might have risen and floated when I saw her.

“For on a day she sent to speak with me.
And when she came to speak, behold her eyes
Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,
Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,
Beautiful in the light of holiness.
And 'O my brother Percivale,' she said,
'Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail :
For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound
As of a silver horn from o'er the hills
110 Blown, and I thought, "It is not Arthur's use
To hunt by moonlight ;" and the slender sound
As from a distance beyond distance grew
Coming upon me—O never harp nor horn,
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand,
Was like that music as it came ; and then

Streamed through my cell a cold and silver beam,
 And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
 Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,
 Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
 With rosy colors leaping on the wall ;
 And then the music faded, and the Grail
 Past, and the beam decayed, and from the walls
 The rosy quiverings died into the night.
 So now the Holy Thing is here again
 Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray,
 And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray,
 That so perchance the vision may be seen
 By thee and those, and all the world be healed.'

120

"Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this
 To all men ; and myself fasted and prayed
 Always, and many among us many a week
 Fasted and prayed even to the uttermost,
 Expectant of the wonder that would be.

130

"And one there was among us, ever moved
 Among us in white armor, Galahad.
 'God make thee good as thou art beautiful,'
 Said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight ; and none
 In so young youth, was ever made a knight
 Till Galahad ; and this Galahad, when he heard

135. **Galahad.**—The son of Sir Lancelot and Elaine. Queen Guinevere says that Sir Lancelot "came of the eighth degree from our Saviour, and Sir Galahad is of the ninth, . . . and therefore be they the greatest gentlemen of all the world."

Sir Galahad was the only knight who could sit in the "Siege Perilous," a seat at the Round Table reserved for the knight destined to achieve the quest of the holy grail; and no other person could sit in it without peril to his life. His great achievement was that of the holy grail. It is quite certain that the Arthurian legends mean that Sir Galahad saw with his bodily eyes and touched with his hands "the incarnate Saviour" reproduced by the consecration of the elements of bread and wine. Others see it by the eye of faith only, but Sir Galahad saw it bodily with his eyes. His shield was that of Joseph of Arimathea. It was a snow-white shield on which Joseph made a cross with his blood. After divers adventures Galahad came to Sarras, where he was made king, was shown the holy grail by Joseph, and even "took the Lord's body between his hands" and died. Then suddenly "a great multitude of angels bear his soul up to heaven," since when no man could say he had seen the holy grail.

140 My sister's vision, filled me with amaze ;
His eyes became so like her own, they seemed
Hers, and himself her brother more than I.

Sister or brother none had he ; but some
Called him a son of Lancelot, and some said
Begotten by enchantment—chatterers they,
Like birds of passage piping up and down,
That gape for flies—we know not whence they come ;
For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd ?

150 “ But she, the wan sweet maiden, shore away
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair
Which made a silken mat-work for her feet ;
And out of this she plaited broad and long
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread
And crimson in the belt a strange device,
A crimson grail within a silver beam ;
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him,
Saying, ‘ My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.
160 Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And break through all, till one will crown thee king
Far in the spiritual city : ’ and as she spake
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes
Through him, and made him hers, and laid her mind
On him, and he believed in her belief.

“ Then came a year of miracle : O brother,
In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,
Fashioned by Merlin ere he past away,
And carven with strange figures ; and in and out
170 The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.

168. **Fashioned by Merlin.**—Merlin also made at Carduel the Round Table for one hundred and fifty knights which came into the possession of King Arthur on his marriage to Guinevere. He is said also to have brought from Ireland the stones of Stonehenge on Salisbury plain, where they commemorate Aurelius Ambrosius' victory over Vortigern.

And Merlin called it 'The Siege Perilous,'
 Perilous for good and ill; 'for there,' he said,
 'No man could sit but he should lose himself :'
 And once by misadventure Merlin sat
 In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,
 Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,
 Cried, 'If I lose myself I save myself !'

"Then on a summer night it came to pass,
 While the great banquet lay along the hall,
 That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

180

"And all at once, as there we sat, we heard
 A cracking and a riving of the roofs,
 And rending, and a blast, and overhead
 Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.
 And in the blast there smote along the hall
 A beam of light seven times more clear than day :
 And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail
 All over covered with a luminous cloud,

172. **The Siege Perilous.**—See note on Galahad, line 135.

182. **And all at once.**—Then anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder. In the midst of the blast entered a sunbeam more clear by seven times than the day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, but there was none that could see it, nor who bare it, but the whole hall was full filled with good odors, and every knight had such meat and drink as he best loved in the world, and when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, then the holy vessel departed suddenly, and they wist not where it became.

Then looked they and saw a man come out of the holy vessel, that had all the signs of the passion of Christ, and he said: "This is the holy dish wherein I ate the lamb on Sher-Thursday, and now hast thou seen it: . . . yet hast thou not seen it so openly as thou shalt see it in the city of Sarras; therefore thou must go hence and bear with thee this holy vessel, for this night it shall depart from the realm of Logris. . . . And take with thee . . . Sir Percivale and Sir Bors."

So departed Sir Galahad, and Sir Percivale and Sir Bors with him. And so they rode three days, and came to a river, and found a ship; . . . and when on board they found in the midst the table of silver and the Sancgreall covered with red samite. Then Sir Galahad laid him down and slept; . . . and when he woke . . . he saw the city of Sarras. . . . At the year's end . . . he saw before him the holy vessel, and a man kneeling upon his knees in the likeness of the bishop, which had about him a great fellowship of angels, as it had been Christ Himself. . . . And when he came to the saking of the Mass, and had done, anon he called Sir Galahad, and said unto him, "Come forth, . . . and thou shalt see that which thou hast much desired to see." . . . And he beheld spiritual things . . . Sir T. Malory, *History of Prince Arthur*.

190

And none might see who bare it, and it past.
But every knight beheld his fellow's face
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,
And staring each at other like dumb men
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.

200

"I sware a vow before them all, that I,
Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,
Until I found and saw it, as the nun
My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow,
And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware,
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest."

210

Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him,
"What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?"
"Nay, for my lord," said Percivale, "the King,
Was not in hall: for early that same day,
Scaped through a cavern from a bandit hold,
An outraged maiden sprang into the hall
Crying on help: for all her shining hair
Was smeared with earth, and either milky arm
Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore
Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn
In tempest: so the King arose and went
To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees
That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit
Some little of this marvel he too saw
Returning o'er the plain that then began
To darken under Camelot: whence the King
Looked up, calling aloud "Lo, there! the roofs
Of our great hall are rolled in thunder-smoke!
Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt.'
For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours,
As having there so oft with all his knights
Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven.

220

"O brother, had you known our mighty hall,
 Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago !
 For all the sacred mount of Camelot,
 And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,
 Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,
 By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook, 230
 Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.
 And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
 With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall.
 And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
 And in the second men are slaying beasts,
 And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
 And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
 And over all one statue in the mold
 Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
 And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star. 240
 And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown
 And both the wings are made of gold, and flame
 At sunrise till the people in far fields,
 Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,
 Behold it, crying, 'We have still a King.'

"And, brother, had you known our hall within,
 Broader and higher than any in all the lands !
 Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars,
 And all the light that falls upon the board
 Streams through the twelve great battles of our King. 250
 Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,
 Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,
 Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur.

253. **The brand Excalibur.**—"After his fight with Pellinore, King Arthur said to Merlin he had no sword, and Merlin took him to a lake and Arthur saw an arm 'clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in the hand.' Presently the Lady of the Lake appeared, and Arthur begged that he might have the sword, and the Lady told him to go and fetch it. When he came to it he took it, and the arm went under the water again. When about to die, King Arthur sent an attendant to cast the sword back again into the lake, and again the hand 'clothed in white samite' appeared, caught it, and disappeared."—*Hist. of Prince Arthur*.

King Arthur's sword Excalibur,
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the lake;
 Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
 Upon the hidden bases of the hills.—*Morte d'Arthur*.

And also one to the west, and counter to it,
 And blank : and who shall blazon it ? when and how ?—
 O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,
 The brand Excalibur will be cast away.

260 “So to this hall full quickly rode the King,
 In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,
 Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt
 In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.
 And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw
 The golded dragon sparkling over all :
 And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms
 Hacked, and their foreheads grimed with smoke, and
 Followed, and in among bright faces, ours, [seared
 Full of the vision, prest : and then the King
 Spake to me, being nearest, ‘Percivale’
 (Because the hall was all in tumult—some
 270 Vowing, and some protesting), ‘what is this ?’

“O brother, when I told him what had chanced,
 My sister’s vision, and the rest, his face
 Darkened, as I have seen it more than once.
 When some brave deed seemed to be done in vain,
 Darken ; and ‘Woe is me, my knights,’ he cried,
 ‘Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow.’
 Bold was mine answer, ‘Had thyself been here,
 My King, thou wouldst have sworn.’ ‘Yea, yea,’ said he.
 ‘Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail ?’

280 “‘Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light,
 But since I did not see the Holy Thing,
 I swear a vow to follow it till I saw.’

“Then when he asked us, knight by knight, if any
 Had seen it, all their answers were as one :
 ‘Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows.’

“‘Lo, now,’ said Arthur, ‘have ye seen a cloud ?
 What go ye into the wilderness to see ?’

“Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice
 Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, called,
 ‘But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,
 I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry—
 “O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me.”’

290

“‘Ah, Galahad, Galahad,’ said the King, ‘for such
 As thou art is the vision, not for these.
 Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign—
 Holier is none, my Percivale, than she—
 A sign to maim this Order which I made.
 But ye, that follow but the leader’s bell’
 (Brother, the King was hard upon his knights)
 ‘Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,
 And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.
 Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne
 Five knights at once, and every younger knight,
 Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot,
 Till overborne by one, he learns—and ye.
 What are ye? Galahads?—no, nor Percivales’
 (For thus it pleased the King to range me close
 After Sir Galahad); ‘nay,’ said he, ‘but men
 With strength and will to right the wronged, of power
 To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,
 Knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed
 The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood—
 But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.
 Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:
 Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm
 Pass through this hall—how often, O my knights,
 Your places being vacant at my side,
 This chance of noble deeds will come and go
 Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires
 Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,

300

310

320

300. **Taliessin**.—Son of St. Henwig, chief of the bards of the West, in the time of King Arthur.

311. **Twelve great battles**.—Resulting in twelve victories over the Saxons.

Return no more : ye think I show myself
 Too dark a prophet : come now, let us meet
 The morrow morn once more in one full field
 Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,
 Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count
 The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,
 Rejoicing in that Order which he made.'

330 "So when the sun broke next from under ground,
 All the great table of our Arthur closed
 And clashed in such a tourney and so full,
 So many lances broken—never yet
 Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came :
 And I myself and Galahad, for a strength
 Was in us from the vision, overthrew
 So many knights that all the people cried,
 And almost burst the barriers in their heat,
 Shouting, 'Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale !'

340 "But when the next day brake from under ground—
 O brother, had you known our Camelot,
 Built by old kings, age after age, so old
 The King himself had fears that it would fall,
 So strange, and rich, and dim ; for where the roofs
 Tottered toward each other in the sky,
 Met foreheads all along the street of those
 Who watched us pass ; and lower, and where the long
 Rich galleries, lady-laden, weighed the necks
 Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,
 Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers
 Fell as we past ; and men and boys astride
 350 On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,
 At all the corners, named us each by name,
 Calling 'God speed !' but in the ways below
 The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor

328. Sun next broke from under ground.—Referring to its appearance when rising in the horizon.

350. On wyvern.—A wyvern was a sort of flying serpent.

Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak
 For grief, and all in middle street the Queen,
 Who rode by Lancelot, wailed and shrieked aloud,
 'This madness has come on us for our sins.'
 So to the Gate of the three Queens we came,
 Where Arthur's wars are rendered mystically,
 And thence departed every one his way.

360

"And I was lifted up in heart, and thought
 Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,
 How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,
 So many and famous names ; and never yet
 Had heaven appeared so blue, nor earth so green,
 For all my blood danced in me, and I knew
 That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

"Thereafter, the dark warning of our King,
 That most of us would follow wandering fires,
 Came like a driving gloom across my mind.
 Then every evil word I had spoken once,
 And every evil thought I had thought of old,
 And every evil deed I ever did,
 Awoke and cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'
 And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself
 Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,
 And I was thirsty even unto death;
 And I, too, cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'

370

"And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst
 Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook
 With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white
 Played ever back upon the sloping wave,
 And took both ear and eye ; and o'er the brook
 Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook
 Fallen, and on the lawns. 'I will rest here,'
 I said, 'I am not worthy of the Quest ;'
 But even while I drank the brook, and ate

380

390

The goodly apples, all these things at once
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

400

“ And then behold a woman at a door
Spinning ; and fair the house whereby she sat,
And kind the woman’s eyes and innocent,
And all her bearing gracious ; and she rose
Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,
‘ Rest here ;’ but when I touched her, lo ! she, too,
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house
Became no better than a broken shed,
And in it a dead babe ; and also this
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.

410

“ And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.
Then flashed a yellow gleam across the world,
And where it smote the plowshare in the field,
The plowman left his plowing, and fell down
Before it ; where it glittered on her pail,
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought
‘ The sun is rising,’ though the sun had risen.
Then was I ware of one that on me moved
In golden armor with a crown of gold
About a casque all jewels ; and his horse
In golden armor jewelled everywhere :
And on the splendor came, flashing me blind ;
And seemed to me the Lord of all the world,
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant
To crush me, moving on me, lo ! he, too,
Opened his arms to embrace me as he came,
And up I went and touched him, and he, too,
Fell into dust, and I was left alone
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

420

“ And I rode on and found a mighty hill,
And on the top, a city walled : the spires

Prieked with incredible pinnaeles into heaven.
 And by the gateway stirred a crowd ; and these
 Cried to me climbing, ‘ Welcome, Percivale !
 Thou mightiest and thou purest among men ! ’
 And glad was I and clomb, but found at top
 No man, nor any voice. And thence I past
 Far through a ruinous city, and I saw
 That man had once dwelt there ; but there I found 430
 Only one man of an exceeding age.
 ‘ Where is that goodly company,’ said I,
 ‘ That so cried out upon me ? ’ and he had
 Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasped,
 ‘ Whence and what art thou ? ’ and even as he spoke
 Fell into dust, and disappeared, and I
 Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,
 ‘ Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself
 And touch it, it will crumble into dust.’

“ And thence I dropt into a lowly vale, 440
 Low as the hill was high, and where the vale
 Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby
 A holy hermit in a hermitage,
 To whom I told my phantoms, and he said :

“ ‘ O son, thou hast not true humility,
 The highest virtue, mother of them all ;
 For when the Lord of all things made Himself
 Naked of glory for His mortal change,
 “ Take thou my robe,” she said, “ for all is thine,”
 And all her form shone forth with sudden light 450
 So that the angels were amazed, and she
 Followed Him down, and like a flying star
 Led on the gray-haired wisdom of the east ;
 But her thou hast not known : for what is this
 Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins ?
 Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself
 As Galahad.’ When the hermit made an end,
 In silver armor suddenly Galahad shone

Before us, and against the chapel door
 460 Laid lance, and entered, and we knelt in prayer.
 And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst,
 And at the sacring of the mass I saw
 The holy elements alone ; but he,
 'Saw ye no more ? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,
 The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine :
 I saw the fiery face as of a child
 That smote itself into the bread, and went ;
 And hither am I come ; and never yet
 Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,
 470 This Holy Thing, failed from my side, nor come
 Covered, but moving with me night and day,
 Fainter by day, but always in the night
 Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh
 Blood-red, and on the naked mountain-top
 Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
 Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,
 Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
 And past through Pagan realms, and made them mine,
 And clashed with Pagan hordes, and bore them down
 480 And broke through all, and in the strength of this
 Come victor. But my time is hard at hand,
 And hence I go ; and one will crown me king
 Far in the spiritual city ; and come thou, too,
 For thou shalt see the vision when I go.'

" While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,
 Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew
 One with him, to believe as he believed.
 Then, when the day began to wane, we went.

490 " There rose a hill that none but man could climb,
 Scarred with a hundred wintry watercourses—
 Storm at the top, and when we gained it, storm
 Round us and death ; for every moment glanced

463. **The holy elements.**—The bread and wine of the Eucharist.
 481, **Come,**—Tense?

His silver arms and gloomed : so quick and thick
 The lightnings here and there to left and right
 Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,
 Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,
 Sprang into fire : and at the base we found
 On either hand, as far as eye could see,
 A great black swamp and of an evil smell,
 Part black, part whitened with the bones of men,
 Not to be crost, save that some ancient king
 Had built a way, where, linked with many a bridge,
 A thousand piers ran into the great Sea.
 And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge,
 And every bridge as quickly as he crost
 Sprang into fire and vanished, though I yearned
 To follow ; and thrice above him all the heavens
 Opened and blazed with thunder such as seemed
 Shoutings of all the sons of God : and first
 At once I saw him far on the great Sea,
 In silver-shining armor starry-clear ;
 And o'er his head the holy vessel hung
 Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud.
 And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat,
 If boat it were—I saw not whence it came.
 And when the heavens opened and blazed again
 Roaring, I saw him like a silver star—
 And had he set the sail, or had the boat
 Become a living creature clad with wings ?
 And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
 Redder than any rose, a joy to me,
 For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn.
 Then in a moment when they blazed again
 Opening, I saw the least of little stars
 Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star
 I saw the spiritual city and all her spires
 And gateways in a glory like one pearl—
 No larger, though the goal of all the saints—
 Strike from the sea ; and from the star there shot

500

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520

530 A rose-red sparkle to the city, and there
Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail,
Which never eyes on earth again shall see.
Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep.
And how my feet recrost the deathful ridge
No memory in me lives ; but that I touched
The chapel-doors at dawn I know ; and thence
Taking my war-horse from the holy man,
Glad that no phantom vexed me more, returned
To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars."

540 " O brother," asked Ambrosius,—“ for in sooth
These ancient books—and they would win thee—teem,
Only I find not there this Holy Grail,
With miracles and marvels like to these,
Not all unlike ; which oftentime I read,
Who read but on my breviary with ease,
Till my head swims ; and then go forth and pass
Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,
And almost plastered like a martin's nest
To these old walls—and mingle with our folk ;
550 And knowing every honest face of theirs
As well as ever shepherd knew his sheep,
And every homely secret in their hearts,
Delight myself with gossip and old wives,
And ills and aches, and teethings, lyings-in,
And mirthful sayings, children of the place,
That have no meaning half a league away :
Or lulling random squabbles when they rise,
Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,
Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,
560 Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs—
O brother, saving this Sir Galahad,
Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,
No man, no woman ?”

Then Sir Percivale :

“ All men, to one so bound by such a vow,

And women were as phantoms. O, my brother,
 Why wilt thou shame me to confess to thee
 How far I faltered from my quest and vow ?
 For after I had lain so many nights,
 A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake, 570
 In grass and burdock, I was changed to wan
 And meager, and the vision had not come ;
 And then I chanced upon a goodly town
 With one great dwelling in the middle of it ;
 Thither I made, and there was I disarmed
 By maidens each as fair as any flower :
 But when they led me into hall, behold,
 The Princess of that castle was the one,
 Brother, and that one only, who had ever
 Made my heart leap ; for when I moved of old 580
 A slender page about her father's hall,
 And she a slender maiden, all my heart
 Went after her with longing : yet we twain
 Had never kissed a kiss, or vowed a vow.
 And now I came upon her once again,
 And one had wedded her, and he was dead,
 And all his land and wealth and state were hers.
 And while I tarried, every day she set
 A banquet richer than the day before
 By me ; for all her longing and her will 590
 Was toward me as of old ; till one fair morn,
 I walking to and fro beside a stream
 That flashed across her orchard underneath
 Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk,
 And calling me the greatest of all knights,
 Embraced me, and so kissed me the first time,
 And gave herself and all her wealth to me.
 Then I rememberd Arthur's warning word,
 That most of us would follow wandering fires,
 And the Quest faded in my heart. Anon, 600
 The heads of all her people drew to me,
 With supplication both of knees and tongue :

' We have heard of thee : thou art our greatest knight,
 Our Lady says it, and we well believe :
 Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,
 And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land.'
 O me, my brother ! but one night my vow
 Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,
 But wailed and wept, and hated mine own self,
 And even the Holy Quest, and all but her ;
 Then after I was joined with Galahad
 Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth."

610

Then said the monk, " Poor men, when yule is cold,
 Must be content to sit by little fires.
 And this am I, so that ye care for me
 Ever so little ; yea, and blest be Heaven
 That brought thee here to this poor house of ours
 Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm
 My cold heart with a friend : but O the pity
 To find thine own first love once more—to hold,
 Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,
 Or all but hold, and then—cast her aside,
 Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.
 For we that want the warmth of double life,
 We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet
 Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich,—
 Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise,
 Seeing I never strayed beyond the cell,
 But live like an old badger in his earth,
 With earth about him everywhere, despite
 All fast and penance. Saw ye none beside,
 None of your knights ?"

620

630

" Yea so," said Percivale :
 " One night my pathway swerving east, I saw
 The pelican on the casque of our Sir Bors
 All in the middle of the rising moon :

613. **Yule.**—The yule log, a large log forming the foundation of the fire.

And toward him spurred, and hailed him, and he me,
 And each made joy of either ; then he asked,
 ' Where is he ? hast thou seen him—Lancelot ?—Once,'
 Said good Sir Bors, ' he dashed across me—mad, 640
 And maddening what he rode : and when I cried,
 " Ridest thou then so hotly on a quest
 So holy," Lancelot shouted, " Stay me not !
 I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace,
 For now there is a lion in the way."
 So vanished.'

" Then Sir Bors had ridden on
 Softly, and sorrowing for our Lancelot,
 Because his former madness, once the talk
 And scandal of our table, had returned ; 650
 For Lancelot's kith and kin so worship him
 That ill to him is ill to them ; to Bors
 Beyond the rest : he well had been content
 Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,
 The Holy Cup of healing ; and, indeed,
 Being so clouded with his grief and love,
 Small heart was his after the Holy Quest :
 If God would send the vision, well : if not,
 The Quest and he were in the hands of Heaven.

" And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors 660
 Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm,
 And found a people there among their crags,
 Our race and blood, a remnant that were left
 Paynim amid their circles, and the stones
 They pitch up straight to heaven : and their wise men
 Were strong in that old magic which can trace
 The wandering of the stars, and scoffed at him
 And this high Quest as at a simple thing :
 Told him he followed—almost Arthur's words—

664. **Paynim.**—Probably the Druids'. Stonehenge offers an instance of their strange religion. Originally it was a circle of thirty stones, fourteen feet high. Such circles were called "doom rings," and each contained an altar on which victims were offered in sacrifice.

670 A mocking fire : ' what other fire than he,
 Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows,
 And the sea rolls, and all the world is warmed ?'
 And when his answer chafed them, the rough crowd,
 Hearing he had a difference with their priests,
 Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell
 Of great piled stones ; and lying bounden there
 In darkness through innumerable hours
 He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep
 Over him, till by miracle—what else ?—
 680 Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,
 Such as no wind could move : and through the gap
 Glimmered the streaming seud : then came a night
 Still as the day was loud ; and through the gap
 The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round—
 For, brother, so one night, because they roll
 Through such a round in heaven, we named the stars,
 Rejoicing in ourselves and in our King—
 And these, like bright eyes of familiar friends,
 In on him shone : ' And then to me, to me,'
 690 Said good Sir Bors, ' beyond all hopes of mine,
 Who scarce had prayed or asked it for myself—
 Across the seven clear stars—O grace to me—
 In color like the fingers of a hand
 Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail
 Glided and past, and close upon it pealed
 A sharp quick thunder.' Afterwards, a maid,
 Who kept our holy faith among her kin
 In secret, entering, loosed and let him go."

To whom the monk : " And I remember now
 700 That pelican on the casque : Sir Bors it was
 Who spake so low and sadly at our board ;
 And mighty reverent at our grace was he :
 A square-set man and honest ; and his eyes,
 An out-door sign of all the warmth within,
 Smiled with his lips—a smile beneath a cloud,
 But heaven had meant it for a sunny one :

Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else? But when ye reached
 The city, found ye all your knights returned,
 Or was there sooth in Arthur's prophecy,
 Tell me, and what said each, and what the King?" 710

Then answered Percivale: "And that can I,
 Brother, and truly; since the living words
 Of so great men as Lancelot and our King
 Pass not from door to door and out again,
 But sit within the house. O, when we reached
 The city, our horses stumbling as they trode
 On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
 Cracked basilisks, and splintered cockatrices,
 And shattered talbots, which had left the stones
 Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall. 720

"And there sat Arthur on the daïs-throne,
 And those that had gone out upon the Quest,
 Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them,
 And those that had not, stood before the King,
 Who, when he saw me, rose, and bade me hail,
 Saying, 'A welfare in thine eye reproves
 Our fear of some disastrous chance for thee
 On hill, or plain, at sea, or flooding ford.
 So fierce a gale made havoc here of late
 Among the strange devices of our kings; 730
 Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours,
 And from the statue Merlin molded for us
 Half-wrenched a golden wing; but now—the Quest,
 This vision—hast thou seen the Holy Cup,
 That Joseph brought of old to Glastonbury?'

"So when I told him all thyself hast heard,
 Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt resolve
 To pass away into the quiet life,
 He answered not, but, sharply turning, asked
 Of Gawain, 'Gawain, was this Quest for thee?' 740

“ ‘Nay, lord,’ said Gawain, ‘not for such as I.
 Therefore I communed with a saintly man,
 Who made me sure the Quest was not for me ;
 For I was much awearied of the Quest :
 But found a silk pavilion in a field,
 And merry maidens in it ; and then this gale
 Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin,
 And blew my merry maidens all about
 With all discomfort ; yea, and but for this,
 750 My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me.’

“ He ceased ; and Arthur turned to whom at first
 He saw not, for Sir Bors, on entering, pushed
 Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand,
 Held it, and there, half-hidden by him, stood,
 Until the King espied him, saying to him,
 ‘Hail, Bors ! if ever loyal man and true
 Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail ;’ and Bors,
 ‘Ask me not, for I may not speak of it,
 I saw it :’ and the tears were in his eyes.

760 “Then there remained but Lancelot, for the rest
 Spake but of sundry perils in the storm ;
 Perhaps, like him of Cana in Holy Writ,
 Our Arthur kept his best until the last ;
 ‘Thou, too, my Lancelot,’ asked the King, ‘my friend,
 Our mightiest, hath this Quest availed for thee ?’

“ ‘Our mightiest !’ answered Lancelot, with a groan ;
 ‘O King !’—and when he paused, methought I spied
 A dying fire of madness in his eyes—
 ‘O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,
 770 Happier are those that welter in their sin,
 Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime,
 Slime of the ditch : but in me lived a sin
 So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
 Noble, and knightly in me twined and elung
 Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower

763. Kept his best until the last.—See John ii. 1-11.

And poisonous grew together, each as each,
Not to be plucked asunder ; and when thy knights
Sware, I sware with them only in the hope
That could I touch or see the Holy Grail
They might be plucked asunder. Then I spake 780
To one most holy saint, who wept and said,
That save they could be plucked asunder, all
My quest were but in vain ; to whom I vowed
That I would work according as he willed.
And forth I went, and while I yearned and strove
To tear the twain asunder in my heart,
My madness came upon me as of old,
And whipt me into waste fields far away ;
There was I beaten down by little men,
Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword 790
And shadow of my spear had been enow
To scare them from me once ; and then I came
All in my folly to the naked shore,
Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew ;
But such a blast, my King, began to blow,
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,
Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,
Though heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens 800
Were shaken with the motion and the sound.
And blackening in the sea-foam swayed a boat,
Half-swallowed in it, anchored with a chain ;
And in my madness to myself I said,
“ I will embark and I will lose myself,
And in the great sea wash away my sin.”
I burst the chain, I sprang into the boat.
Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,
And with me drove the moon and all the stars ;
And the wind fell, and on the seventh night 810
I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,
And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up,

Behold, the enchanted towers of Carbonek,
A castle like a rock upon a rock,
With chasm-like portals open to the sea,
And steps that met the breaker ! there was none
Stood near it but a lion on each side
That kept the entry, and the moon was full.
Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.
820 There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes
Those two great beasts rose upright like a man,
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between ;
And, when I would have smitten them, heard a voice,
“ Doubt not, go forward ; if thou doubt, the beasts
Will tear thee piecemeal.” Then with violence
The sword was dashed from out my hand, and fell.
And up into the sounding hall I past ;
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,
830 No bench nor table, painting on the wall
Or shield of night ; only the rounded moon
Through the tall oriel on the rolling sea.
But always in the quiet house I heard,
Clear as a lark, high o’er me as a lark,
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower
To the eastward : up I climbed a thousand steps
With pain : as in a dream I seemed to climb
Forever : at the last I reached a door,
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,
“ Glory and joy and honor to our Lord
840 And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.”
Then in my madness I essayed the door ;
It gave ; and through a stormy glare, a heat
As from a seven-times heated furnace, I,
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,
With such a fierceness that I swooned away—
O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
All palled in crimson, samite, and around
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.

831. Tall oriel.—Meaning?

And but for all my madness and my sin,
 And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw
 That which I saw ; but what I saw was veiled
 And covered ; and this Quest was not for me.'

850

"So speaking, and here ceasing, Lancelot left
 The hall long silent, till Sir Gawain—nay,
 Brother, I need not tell thee foolish words,—
 A reckless and irreverent knight was he,
 Now boldened by the silence of his King,—
 Well, I will tell thee : ' O King, my liege,' he said,
 ' Hath Gawain failed in any quest of thine ?
 When have I stinted stroke in foughten field ?
 But as for thine, my good friend Percivale,
 Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,
 Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least.
 But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
 I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
 And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
 To holy virgins in their eestasies,
 Henceforward.'

860

" ' Deafer,' said the blameless King,
 ' Gawain, and blinder unto holy things
 Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,
 Being too blind to have desire to see.
 But if indeed there came a sign from heaven,
 Blessed are Bors, Lancelot, and Percivale,
 For these have seen according to their sight.
 For every fiery prophet in old times,
 And all the sacred madness of the bard,
 When God made music through them, could but speak
 His music by the framework and the chord;
 And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth.

870

880

" ' Nay—but thou errest, Lancelot : never yet
 Could all of true and noble in knight and man
 Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,
 With such a closeness, but apart there grew,

Save that he were the swine thou spakest of,
 Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness ;
 Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower.

890 “ ‘ And spake I not too truly, O my knights ?
 Was I too dark a prophet when I said
 To those who went upon the Holy Quest,
 That most of them would follow wandering fires,
 Lost in the quagmire ?—lost to me and gone,
 And left me gazing at a barren board,
 And a lean Order—scarce returned a tithe—
 And out of those to whom the vision came
 My greatest hardly will believe he saw ;
 Another had beheld it afar off,
 And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,
 Cares but to pass into the silent life.
 900 And one hath had the vision face to face,
 And now his chair desires him here in vain,
 However they may crown him elsewhere.

910 “ ‘ And some among you held, that if the King
 Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow :
 Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
 That which he rules, and is as but the hind
 To whom a space of land is given to plow.
 Who may not wander from the allotted field
 Before his work be done ; but, being done,
 Let visions of the night or of the day
 Come, as they will ; and many a time they come,
 Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
 This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
 This air that smites his forehead is not air
 But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—
 In moments when he feels he cannot die,
 And knows himself no vision to himself,
 Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
 Who rose again : ye have seen what ye have seen.’

920 “ So spake the King : I knew not all he meant.”

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